

## Cancer helps photog see the big picture

BY RICHARD HUFF  
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WHEN HE WAS diagnosed with cancer three years ago, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer John Kaplan did what he knew best – he reached for his camera.

Kaplan began recording his journey for himself, though it eventually turned into the documentary “Not As I Pictured,” airing Saturday at 3 p.m. on WNET/Ch. 13.

“I was not emotionally prepared,” Kaplan says about getting the devastating news. “Rarely had I ever been sick in my entire adult life. I started taking pictures and video purely as a way to cope with my fear.”

It all began when he went to the doctor thinking he had an inconsequential hernia – something he and his wife looked up online. A CAT scan uncovered a tumor on his kidney, but during surgery doctors found his condition was worse than they thought. He was diagnosed with a deadly form of lymphoma.

He then started shooting.

“It was a way to keep myself busy during the treatment, and not to think about my own mortality,” he says.

He was determined to get a film made out of his adventure, too.

“I believed I had something to share that could lend that little nugget of courage to patients and their families,” he says.

That said, filming his own struggle wasn’t easy. Kaplan is used to recording the troubles of others, often with a caring eye. But he’d also sat in on enough awards judging sessions to know a film about a cancer patient was sort of a cliché.

“That irony hit me as I faced my biggest fears,” he says.

Kaplan vowed his film, his journey,

would be different. He wanted something positive, something upbeat and affirmative, without being sappy.

“I did it to lend some insight and encouragement to others facing the very real, scary challenges of a cancer diagnosis,” he says. “It doesn’t pull at your heartstrings the way ‘Brian’s Song’ would.”

“Brian’s Song,” of course, is the 1971 movie about Chicago Bears football players Brian Piccolo and Gale Sayers, after Piccolo found out he was dying.

“I wanted it to be approachable,” he says.

As for his own fight, Kaplan says he always believed he would beat cancer.

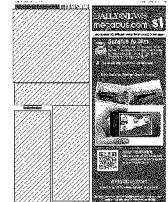
“I thought it was possible I could die,” he says. “But I have the will to live. I’ve never been a why-me type of guy. If we live long enough, we’re all going to experience some exuberant days and some days we wish we’d never woken up. I believed I would find a way to fight through.”

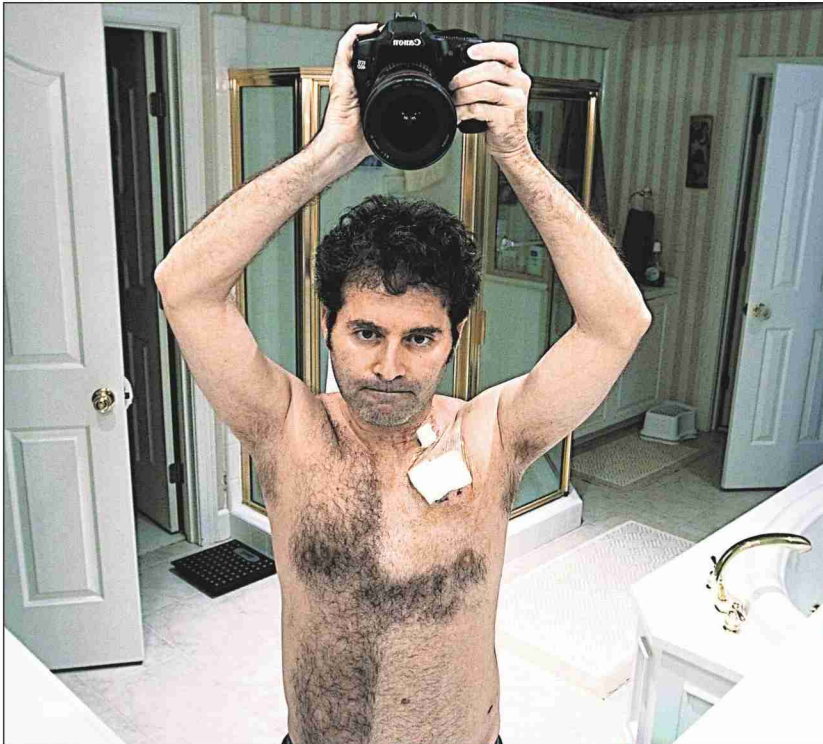
He has. Kaplan’s cancer has been in remission since 2010.

As part of making the film, Kaplan is giving away 10,000 copies of it. Information on getting one will air at the end of the Ch. 13 telecast, or can be found at [notasipictured.org](http://notasipictured.org). He’s also got a photo exhibit on the way, and he’s pleased that medical schools are using it to help train doctors to be more patient-centric.

“I never minded seeing myself at my most vulnerable,” says the married father of two. “I didn’t mind opening up and sharing my experience and family’s experience. I thought it could open up a little bit of a window in helping others know, it’s not what I expected, but not as bad as it might seem.”

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**John Kaplan begins his self-filmed documentation of his battle with lymphoma.**